121 system of the central area of South Malabar and
101 Cochin, with brief references to social structure and Nayar kinship in North Malabar. No account is given of Travancore, since no fieldwork was done in that area.

631 III The Traditional Political System in the Cen-
564 tral Kingdoms

(1) Caste and Territorial Divisions

Throughout Kerala, the highest Hindu caste was the Nambudiri Brahmans, ritual and scholastic leaders of the people, who today form one hundredth of the total population. Carriers of the Sanskrit language and of ancient Vedic culture, they are thought to have entered Malabar by peaceful infiltration from the eastern plateau [11] early in the Christian era and to have established themselves, by reason of their literacy and supposedly superior ritual knowledge, as religious leaders over the already established
565 population. In the traditional period, they were
631 throughout Kerala important landowners and priests, in charge of most of the temples and public rituals. They ranked ritually above the kings and were above and outside the political systems of the several kingdoms. Alone of all the castes, they moved freely unmolested between enemy kingdoms, married across the boundaries, held periodic ceremonies and feasts attended by their caste-members from all parts of Kerala, and carried on their separate system
565 of intra-caste administration independently of the
631 administration of justice within the kingdoms.
623 For the latter purpose they divided out Kerala

565 into 64 gramams (caste areas), within each of
631 which a Nambudiri assembly composed of the
623 oldest members of the patrilineal extended families of the area met periodically to arrange public ceremonies and tried cases of offence against caste laws. Within each gramam, the Nambu-
[564] diris were divided into ranked subcastes according to their wealth and ritual functions; these,
565 however, need not concern us here. Over the
631 whole area, a dignitary known as the Aravan-
693 cheri Tamburakkal, [12] who resided in Travancore, was universally acknowledged as the ritual and administrative leader of the Nambudiris. This high priest was accorded the right to crown the kings of both Calicut and Cochin, though these rulers were traditionally at enmity. His jurisdiction in matters of the religious law governing social relations between castes, was acknowledged through out the area. The field of social relations of the Nambudiris was thus the whole of Kerala.

565 The ritual prestige of Nambudiris was sup-
596 ported by their wealth: each patrilineal extended family owned the land in at least one village, and in addition local groups of family heads managed lands owned by important Brahman temples in each kingdom. The Nambudiris had a patrilineal
[611] descent system of a peculiar type described below.

565 Below the Nambudiris in ritual rank came the
613 royal matrilineal lineages of Calicut, Walluva-
631 nad and Cochin. Though undoubtedly Nayar in origin and general culture, each of these lineages considered itself superior in ritual rank to its

565 Nayar subjects within the kingdom. Between
613 kingdoms, royal lineages disputed for rank and
631 would not intermarry: though exogamous, therefore, each lineage considered itself to form a separate and unique [13] subcaste. The Cochin lineage, being more ancient than the rest, claimed the ritual rank of Kshattriyas (the second of the four varnas or major caste-groups of ancient North India Vedic Society, in ancient times kings and warriors.) The Walluvanad and Calicut lineages, of more recent Nayar origin, were not strictly recognized as Kshattriyas, but were accorded the title of Samantans, a Sanskrit word meaning "leaders." In each royal lineage, the oldest man of the whole lineage, irrespective of branch, was the crowned king and administered traditional secular rule with assistance from advisers of wealthy Nambudiri families of the kingdom, some of whom were employed as ambassadors.

[643]

Each kingdom was divided into nads or chiefdoms. In the Zamorin's kingdom, at the height of its power, some of these nads were former independent kingdoms which had been conquered by Calicut but were still ruled by their traditional monarchs who paid tribute to Calicut. These nads included Parappanad, Beypore and Chavakkad, each of whose rulers, though feudatory, claimed and were accorded higher ritual rank than the Zamorin's lineage by reason of their more ancient tradition of government. Other nads of the Calicut kingdom were ruled by hereditary Nayar chiefs (naduvaris) originally appointed by the Zamorin. [14] These ruled with

525 similar powers to those of the feudatory mon-
613 archs, but, though they were accorded the title
631 of Samantans, were considered of lower ritual rank than the Zamorin's lineage. Similarly, some nads of the Cochin kingdom were governed by conquered feudatory kings of higher ritual rank than, but administratively subordinate to, the royal lineage, and others by lower ranking Samantan chiefs appointed by the king. Within each kingdom, the Samantan chiefs' lineages formed a single subcaste.

525 Each nad was in turn divided into villages or
621 desams, the basic units of the political system.
423 A desam appears usually to have covered from one to four square miles, comprising one or more stretches of dry garden land surrounded by, or surrounding, flats of alluvial paddy land. The land in each desam was owned by one landlord family of superior ritual rank to the other occupants of the villages. In some villages, the land was owned by a single Nambudiri partilineal extended family whose large house stood in a central position in the village. In others, it was owned by one or other branch of the royal matrilineage which had built a small palace in the village and whose eldest male member acted as a village headman. In other villages, the land was owned by the chiefly matrilineal lineage of the nad, whether this [15] were of feudatory rank of vassal Samantan rank. Again in this case the chiefly family would live in a small palace in the centre of the village and fulfill the role of headman. In other villages, the land was owned by some famous Hindu temple of the kingdom, often

565 at a distance of several miles, and managed by
621 Nambudiri Brahmans. In this case a represen-
423 tative Nambudiri patrilineal family might live in the village and play the role of headman. In yet other villages, which probably comprised about half the villages in the kingdom, the land was owned by the matrilineage of a hereditary Nayar village headman (desavari) originally appointed by the king or by the chief of the nad. The Nayar desavaris of a chiefdom collectively formed a subcaste ritually lower than the subcaste of chiefs of their kingdom. In Walluvanad and Calicut the subcaste of village headmen was called Kiriattil Nayar; in Cochin they were called Vellayma Nayars.

565 The landowning families in all of these types
622 of villages were called janmis. In every case,
423 no matter whether the janmi were of a patrilineal or a matrilineal caste, the eldest man of the extended family had legal guardianship of his own family, and in another sense, of the village lands and the lower caste inhabitants. [16] In addition to his economic rights, the janmi had administrative rights. First, he must sanction marriages of all castes in the village, none of which could be performed without his consent. Second came ambalapadhi or control of ceremonies in the village temple(s); and third urayma or direction of temple lands and servants.
[346] (It should be made clear that each village had its public temple apart from the larger temples of the chiefdom and the kingdom.) While headman of the village and a landowner in a certain sense, however, the janmi could not sell away his lands

565 without the direction of the chief. Usually, a
622 janmi family remained in situ over many gener-
423 ations. In addition, the janmi was obliged to lease off on long term tenure a large part of his lands to Nayar retainers and could not retract these without the tenant's consent or without the aid of a public assembly of tenants in case of ill-doing on the part of one of them.

621 Traditional villages are classifiable therefore
631 as 1) Braham; 2) Temple; 3) Royal; 4) Chiefly;
565 5) Nayar headmen's villages. In some areas,
644 a group of villages of the same type might be found adjacent to each other; this was particularly the case with "Brahman" and "Nayar headmen's" villages, where four or five might form a cluster headed by janmis of the same subcaste. [17] In each village, subordinate to the janmi's lineage in ritual rank and administrative power, came the members of one or other subcaste of
[701] Nayar retainers. Nayar retainers, whom I shall also call Military Nayars since most of them were soldiers, were divided into three subcaste: 1) retainers of Nambudiri Brahmans and of temples, called Sudra Nayars in Calicut and Walluvanad and Illath Sudra Nayars in Cochin; 2) retainers of the royal lineage, or "palanquin-bearers," called Pallichans in all three kingdoms; and 3) retainers of the chiefs and the Nayar village headmen, called Charna Nayars in Calicut and Walluvanad and Swaroopattil Sud-
[264] ra Nayars in Cochin. Each of these subcastes disputed for ritual rank and in everyday circumstances would not interdine with each other. This dispute for rank was possible because they

621 occupied separate sets of villages and were not
631 subject to each others' jurisdiction. In war,
565 however, they might interdine freely and spend
644 the night in each others' houses. In villages owned by Nambudiris or by Nambudiri-owned temples the retainer-Nayar were of group (1), in royal villages, of group (2), and in chiefly and village headmen's lineages, of group (3). In Calicut and Walluvanad however, group (3) was further subdivided into Agattu Charna Nayars or indoor retainers, [18] and Purattu Charnas or outdoor retainers. Purattu Charnas were retainers to chiefs and headmen, Agattu Charnas houseservants and clerks (with the title Menon - clerk) within the royal palaces. In Calicut, the Purattu Charnas were still further subdivided into ordinary Purattu Charnas who served chiefs and headmen, and special Purattu Charnas or Pariccha Menons who formed the personal bodyguard of the kind and senior princes.

613 In each village, there were traditionally four,
621 five or six matrilineages of the appropriate re-
427 tainer subcaste. The separate households or
566 property-groups within each lineage had the hereditary right, granted by the Raja, to occupy freely stretches of garden land, and to lease large plots of wet rice land on long-term tenure from the janmi. This tenure was called kanam; the tenant, a kanamdar or kanakkaran. At the start of a period of tenure, the legal guardian (oldest man or karanavan) of the Nayar retainer household paid a lump sum in cash to the janmi, called kanam. Thereafter he paid an annual rent

(3) Traditional Political Administration

642 The "middle class" non-military Nayars, the
565 Nayar servant castes of menials, all the lower
• polluting castes, and the serfs, were excluded from the administrative system of the kingdom. Above these castes, the "good" castes formed two hierarchies, the one concerned with the public ritual of the state, and the other with secular administration. The first hierarchy comprised Nambudiris and temple servants; the second, royalty, chiefs and Nayar retainers. Nambudiris were largely outside the legal system of the kingdom; temple servants, though subject to it, took no part in its administration. Political organization was in the hands of the Nayars, their chiefs, and their royal lineage.

643 While responsible for maintaining traditional
701 unwritten law and custom (mamool) among the
631 several castes, the kings were concerned chiefly with amassing soldiers for their armies. Though in each kingdom the royal lineage owned the land in many villages as its private estate, its strength was estimated not in territory but in numbers of Nayar soldiers. Each nad and each desam was classified according to the number of Nayar men it could customarily muster for war; records[31]of these were kept by the
702 Nayar clerks of the palaces. The chief duty of each naduvari was to assemble regularly the soldiers of his nad for military exercises, and in time of war to lead them to battle with the king himself at their head. Within the nad military training was organized on a village basis, sometimes by the Nayar desavari, or, in those villages without a Nayar headman, by a Nayar

613 the expansion of overseas' trade with the Arabs
644 and later, the Europeans, from the twelfth to
631 the eighteenth centuries; the developments of
better means of communication in the larger
kingdoms of the plains, where this was not too
difficult; some ammassing of wealth in the hands
of rulers; and leading from this, their ability
to organize larger armies which (especially
after the adoption of gun-warfare) permitted
them to conquer neighbouring weaker nads.
The persistence of these larger units seems to
have depended on the strength of their new po-
litical institutions, chiefly [98] the militia and
the central courts of justice, as well as on a
widening of the field of social relations of the
"good" castes who controlled the administra-
613 tion. Along with this went a very slow process
644 of social mobility in the upper reaches of the
631 society. The caste system of rulers, chiefs,
565 village headmen and retainers was not entirely
stationary: retainer-lineages which had dis-
tinguished themselves in war were sometimes
appointed as desavaris and gradually changed
their ritual rank, and it was possible for a
desavari lineage to increase in wealth and be
made a naduvari lineage, or for a small nadu-
vari lineage to increase in wealth (as did the
Zamorins), expand its territory, and call itself
a royal lineage, claiming the rank of Kshattri-
yas. This process took some time, indeed: it
was not until the eighteenth century that the
Zamorin's lineage, after going through a cere-
mony in which its members passed through the
body of a golden cow, were able to claim that

613 they had been reborn as Kshattriyas, and to
644 shake off their marital ties with feudatory lin-
631 eages and marry their women only to Nambu-
565 diris. The same process went on in other parts of Kerala; it is even whispered by some in North Malabar that the Kadattunad lineage started out as a high class Nayar taravad with the title of Adiodi and, through outstanding military services and marriage alliances with Kolattiri, gradually established itself first as naduvaris and later as an independent royal lineage.

613 The size and cohesion of a kingdom thus de-
644 pended not on kinship factors but on political
631 and economic factors such [99] as trade, eco-
601 nomic specialization and the development of specialized political institutions. When their kingdoms and private estates became large, the kinship systems of the royal lineages adapted themselves to this change: they modified their residence-patterns, practised exclusively hypergamous marriage, and developed the institution of athanams. It is arguable that had their economy and political institutions developed still further before the British came, they would have been obliged to change their kinship system still more, for the unwieldy structure of matrilineal lineages, with segments periodically hiving off and claiming themselves independent, certainly made it difficult to establish a stable
613 system of succession to the crown. The history
644 of the Cochin lineage, which had two athanams
631 and in the fifteenth century partitioned into five property-groups, was from 1510 to 1792 one of perpetual dissension between the heads of

12:Peter E-5 (1939, 1949) 1963 AWll Kerala AWll

3. THE PEOPLE

The new State is one of the most densely populated in the whole of India, as well as one in which the percentage of literacy is highest. Unfortunately no current statistics are available, as Kerala is of very recent creation, but some idea can be gained from the fact that in the Ponani taluk of the former district of Malabar, according to the Madras Government Statistical Atlas, 1935, there were 626,500 inhabitants, or 1,471 per square mile. The rate of increase of the population is also very rapid: about 11% every ten years. The percentage of education is highest in Travancore, Cochin. In 1951, 53.8% were reported literate (*Census of India*, Vol. xii).

The people of Kerala are a very complex collection and it would be hopeless to attempt to give a full and detailed description of them. The reader is referred to those works on the subject which have already been published, the titles of some of which can be found in the Bibliography. In order to understand, however, the extraordinary way in which Kerala society is partitioned into a number of individual groups, and how each of these has its own particular customs and ways, as for instance polyandry, it is essential to give a general idea of the different castes and subcastes which compose the population, with a brief outline of their social organization and professional occupations.

Rather naturally, as is to be expected from the mythological version of the origins of the country mentioned above, the summit of the hierarchy is occupied by the *Nambudri Brahmin*. As W. Logan very aptly puts it in his *Malabar* (Madras, 1887): "His person is holy; his directions command, his movements are a procession; his meals nectar; he is the holiest of human beings, the representative of God on earth." (p. 127). There are eight subdivisions to the caste, some more holy than others, by reason of the occupations which they pursue. Other Brahmins in Malabar, who have come from outside and are thus somewhat looked down upon, are the Pattars, Embrandiris, Tamil and Konkani Brahmins.

Below this exalted strata of Kerala society come the *Ambalavasis* or temple attendants, of whom there exist roughly nine subdivisions. With them are to be classed the self-styled *Kshattriyas* and the *Samantans*, from whose ranks are drawn the flower of the former military aristocracy. The Malayalam maharajas and rajas all belong to this class, as does the family of the Zamorin of Calicut.

In immediate succession are the *Nayars*, Sudras by caste, descendants of those easterners whom Parasu Raman brought in for the protection